

PRINCE BIJLOW AND HIS MEMOIRS

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and the Crown through. How long we remain in this house is another question."

When the Chancellor had finished his brief but pregnant speech in the Reichstag on the *Daily Telegraph* incident, his friend Bkssermann, the National Liberal leader, remarked :

" It was a political and oratorical masterpiece. But what will the Kaiser say to it?" Billow replied that he hoped His Majesty would place the welfare of the Empire above petty personal considerations. " So he would if he were like his father or his grandfather," rejoined Bassermann; " but he is too vain." His reading of the Imperial character was correct.

Already in the spring of 1908 the Kaiser had remarked to the Minister of War, who passed on the ominous words : ** Billow

is getting too big for me." When the November storm blew over he regained his self-confidence, and the Chancellor's

enemies at Court began to whisper that he had let his master down. Here is the declaration to the Reichstag which led to his undoing. " Gentlemen, I have formed in these days the firm conviction that the publication of His Majesty's conversations in England, which has not produced the result he desired but has caused great excitement and poignant regret in our country, will lead me to counsel the Emperor to maintain in

future the reserve in private conversations which is equally indispensable to the unified policy and the authority of the Crown. Were it otherwise, neither I nor any of my successors

could assume responsibility." In dictating his Memoirs many years later, the fallen Minister observed that he still believed the words to have been absolutely necessary.

During the following months the ruler's demeanour varied between friendliness and reserve, and once of twice it seemed as if the old cordiality was about to be resumed. No sharp

word was ever spoken, and he never hinted to his Minister that he wished for a change. But the process by which, in the words of Billow, " he first turned from me and then against me, behind the mask of friendship and goodwill," went steadily forward, as the Chancellor learned to his disgust both from his friends and his foes. Courts cannot keep secrets, and in the spring of 1909 he was no longer in doubt that his master was looking round for a successor. The main Parliamentary business of 1908-9 was the reform of taxation, partially necessitated by the growth of the fleet, of which the most controversial item was a tax on inheritance. The proposal was bitterly opposed by the Conservatives. The *bloc* which had